

Press Release

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Contact: DHS Press Office, (202) 282-8010

DHS REMINDS VISA WAIVER PROGRAM TRAVELERS OF ESTA REQUIREMENTS EFFECTIVE TODAY

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) today reminded travelers from all Visa Waiver Program (VWP) countries that they are now required to obtain approval through the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to traveling to the United States. This requirement, effective today, applies to all eligible citizens or nationals traveling under the VWP.

“We have been collecting information from visa waiver travelers for decades, and establishing a program to get that same information in advance is one enhancement that allowed us to extend the valuable benefit of visa-free travel to eight new countries in 2008,” said Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff. “In addition to building business and cultural ties with our partners overseas, this is a commonsense step into the 21st century that will improve our efficiency in screening and welcoming international travelers at our ports of entry.”

ESTA is a web-based system, initially launched in August 2008, that determines the preliminary eligibility of visitors to travel under the VWP prior to boarding a carrier to the United States. To date, more than 1.2 million ESTA applications have been received, and more than 99.6 percent of applicants have been approved, most within seconds.

DHS will take a reasonable approach to travelers who have not obtained an approved travel authorization via ESTA, and will continue an aggressive advertising and outreach campaign throughout 2009. Travelers are advised, however, that they may be denied boarding, experience delayed processing, or be denied admission at a U.S. port of entry. Visitors may apply for travel authorization via the ESTA Web site at <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov>.

DHS received authorization for VWP reforms through the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. The VWP is administered by the department and enables eligible citizens or nationals of certain countries to travel to the United States for tourism or business for stays of 90 days or less without obtaining a visa. To be admitted to the VWP, a country must meet various statutory requirements, such as more enhanced law enforcement and security-related data sharing with the U.S. and timely reporting of both blank and issued lost and stolen passports. VWP members are also required to maintain high counter-terrorism, law enforcement, border control, and document security standards.

The citizens or nationals of the following countries are currently eligible to travel to the United States under the VWP: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Eight new countries joined the VWP in 2008, and their citizens and nationals have been required to comply with an ESTA since their designation as VWP participants: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, the Republic of Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Malta.

For additional information on ESTA, visit www.cbp.gov/esta, and for more information on the VWP, please visit http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/id_visa/business_pleasure/vwp/.

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